



Do green spaces evoke fear?

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DO GREEN SPACES EVOKE FEAR?

Sreetheran Maruthaveeran & Konijnendijk, CC

The link between green spaces and people has been studied extensively in various fields including environmental psychology, urban forestry and landscape architecture. Many of these studies deal with the positive impact of green spaces to the quality of life and well-being of people such as providing aesthetic experiences and recreational opportunities.

Green spaces are popularly associated with enhancing human health and well-being as well as providing opportunities for obtaining knowledge on nature and natural processes. While the benefits of green spaces are significant, these types of spaces may also evoke a sense of fear. Very few studies have examined these negative emotions, particularly the fear in urban green spaces.

Crime occurs when the victim is subjected to physical or sexual assaults, burglary and bullying. Since the 1960s fear of crime has been a subject of great interest for criminologists. On the other hand, fear is triggered by the perception of threat. A person feels fear of crime when he perceives a situation that is associated with crime.

Understanding fear of crime requires studying the stimuli that creates the fear, nevertheless studies conducted on urban green spaces are much less compared to in-built environments. Knowledge on the relationship between green spaces and human responses such as fear and crime in urban areas are well documented in Western European and North American settings. Unfortunately, not much is known for the East, particularly the Asian region which has prompted a preliminary study by Forest Research Institute Malaysia and University of Copenhagen. At present, a conceptual framework for analysing fear of crime in urban green spaces has been established from related studies conducted globally.



Many urban green spaces also include facilities such as children's playground

What Evokes Fear of Crime in Urban Green Spaces?

Basically fear of crime is influenced by the human factor such as age, gender, ethnic minorities, personal experiences; and the surrounding environment such as presence of tramps, beggar, drug users, loitering individuals, vandalism, graffiti, garbage, abandoned cars or houses, as well as green spaces having poor design and poor maintenance.

Ways of Reducing the Fear

The heightening sense of fear in urban green spaces can be tackled in many ways. Creating a sense of security and safety is an essential prerequisite of a successful urban green space because it may determine the behaviour of people.

Proper maintenance of green spaces is one way of reducing fear as also proper species selection. Both factors are closely connected whereby a selection primarily based on aesthetic features might overlook the maintenance requirements thus unnecessarily increase the cost required.

A good planting design could also facilitate natural surveillance and also increase visibility and reduce concealment in urban green spaces. It could also



Some options of reducing fear of crime in green spaces

provide more accessibility or escape routes when needed. The safety aspect is pertinent and should be addressed both by landscape architects and designer during the planning stage.

Improved lighting and their placement in the park on top of having security officers or wardens in green spaces are all enhancements of safety for the people. Entrances to parks could also play a role to create the sense of security in addition to activities conducted that appeal to the public.



A well-maintained park may allay feeling of fear for visitors to this park



Damaged swing in a park may create a sense of fear for some people

ABOUT THE MAIN AUTHOR

Sreetheran Maruthaveeran is a Research Officer at the Urban Forestry Branch in FRIM. He conducts environmental behavioural studies on urban green spaces. He is also a Certified Arborist with the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), USA. Currently he is pursuing his PhD studies at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark under Prof Dr Cecil C Konijnendijk on fear of crime in urban green spaces.